

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning**

REPORT

**Meánscoil Iognáid Rís,
Longmile Road, Dublin 12
Roll number: 60480G**

Date of inspection: April 2013



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
AND SKILLS
INSPECTORATE**

Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2013, in Meánscoil Iognáid Rís. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected.

Introduction

Meánscoil Iognáid Rís, Drimnagh Castle was found by the Christian Brothers in 1954. The school is under the patronage of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school is a voluntary all boys secondary school with a current enrolment of 673 students.

The school offers the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) the established Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Although the school does not participate in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative, it benefits from elements of the School Completion Programme (SCP). The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board maintains a good oversight of the provision of education in the school to ensure its ongoing effectiveness and has overseen significant investment in the school facilities.
- Senior management, comprising principal and deputy principal, has effectively managed a period of considerable change and improvement over the past few years.
- Teachers are committed to the development of the school, have engaged well with changes and have demonstrated leadership and willingness to lead projects and initiatives.
- The school offers a very broad and balanced curriculum to its students with a significant choice of optional subjects. However, such a wide-ranging curriculum may not be sustainable in the long-term.
- A good range of educational supports is being provided for the students who also have opportunities to participate in a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was good or very good with scope for development in a few lessons, where collaborative and cooperative learning opportunities for students should be developed further.
- Successful lessons were characterised by teachers creating a stimulating learning environment, linking learning with real life contexts and setting challenging activities that encouraged active student engagement in their learning.
- The overall quality of subject planning documents varied considerably with some examples of very good practices and scope for further development of collaborative practices within subject departments.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management should ensure that ratification of policies as outlined in the report is addressed, ensuring compliance with circulars, with Circular M29/95 Time in School being prioritised.
- The inclusion of the analysis of students' progress and the overall academic attainment of students on the board's agenda at regular intervals is recommended.
- A curriculum review committee should be established to review, support and progress curriculum development in the school.
- Management should develop and implement a systematic programme of whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) to support the development of teaching and learning strategies.
- To augment the current provision of Special Education Needs (SEN) support, consideration should be given to additional strategies including team teaching to maximise the available resources.
- A whole-school strategy and approach to assessment should be developed and implemented which would incorporate the systematically monitoring of students' progress and attainment.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is appropriately constituted and is in the final year of its term of office. The board maintains a good oversight of the provision of education in the school to ensure its ongoing effectiveness. Regular meetings of the board take place and minutes indicate that issues arising include policy review and ratification, student behavioural issues and financial matters. At the end of board meetings, an agreed statement is prepared for dissemination to the parents' council and the staff.

On the establishment of each new board, a three-year plan for school development is prepared and reviewed on an annual basis. Priorities for school development identified by the current board include: development of school policies, financial management and the strengthening of partnerships within the school. Progress has been made in many of these areas. The board of management reviews policies pertaining to admissions and student behaviour on an annual basis. These policies endeavour to promote and support a positive and inclusive student environment. Further development of policies such as, the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) should be undertaken in line with relevant circulars.

Members of the board have availed of training provided by the Joint Managerial Board (JMB) and ERST. In line with best practice, various subcommittees are established on a needs basis to support the work of the board. More recently, the student council has met with and presented to the board.

The principal's report to the board provides information regarding students' performance in state examinations. The inclusion of the analysis of students' progress and the overall academic attainment of students on the board's agenda at regular intervals is recommended. The board should also instigate strategies to monitoring school improvement initiatives to ensure that they are impacting positively on students' learning.

Senior management, comprising principal and deputy principal work together in a collaborative and collegial manner. They have effectively introduced and managed significant change resulting from the retirement of a number of staff. Challenges encountered during this transition phase necessitated senior management undertaking duties

normally associated with in-school management. More recently, senior management has successfully managed the introduction of teacher-based classrooms, overseen infrastructural changes and the introduction of mixed-ability as a basis of class formation into first year. These are commendable educational improvements, which also include significant investment in information and communications technology (ICT).

Senior management meet on daily basis to identify matters to be addressed and to ensure the efficient day-to-day running of the school. They have defined roles of responsibility with aspects of shared responsibility. They demonstrate a strong commitment to the ongoing development of a programme for change for the school.

The principal effectively oversees and manages communication with the wider education community. He facilitates devolved leadership in a strategic and effective manner and takes an active role in the monitoring and tracking of students' progress, particularly at senior cycle. The deputy principal plays a vital and supportive role in the overall management of the school. Specific duties include mentoring newly appointed teachers, monitoring daily attendance and teaching duties, all of which support his role in the effective management of students.

In planning for further school development, senior management guided by the board of management should prioritise the following areas: the establishment of a curriculum review committee, further development of subject and programme planning and the identification of CPD needs of staff at whole-school level.

Given the impact of recent retirements among senior staff, the need to ensure an effective in-school management team was acknowledged by all during the evaluation. A review of the post structure was successfully undertaken recently and has facilitated the reassignment of duties to support the effective management of the school. In line with best practice, an annual review of each post and associated duties is planned. To date, in-school management has opportunities to meet as a team and post holders are developing their specific roles and responsibilities. Over time, consideration should be given to developing the in-school management team as a consultative body to support senior management in progressing priority areas for development.

Teachers are committed to the development of the school and have engaged well with the changes that have been led by the senior management team. Teachers have taken on the voluntary role of class tutor demonstrating leadership which is to be commended. Likewise, staff members have also availed of the opportunities to lead projects and initiatives, including the Literacy Strategy team and the Green Schools committee.

Teachers present at staff meetings and the continuance of this good practice is encouraged. It was evident from a review of the minutes of recent staff meetings that staff has identified areas for further CPD. In this context, consideration should be given to whole staff in-service on differentiation teaching strategies and assessment for learning.

The parents' council works in collaboration with the school management. They meet regularly and are actively involved with the school in co-hosting social events that celebrate school success and achievement. In addition, the council contributes to the ongoing review of school policies.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The overall academic performance of students is good and development in some subject areas have been noted by senior management. The recent introduction of tracking and monitoring students' progress at senior cycle is welcomed and the plan to extend this

practice to other year groupings should be progressed. To further support work in this area, it is recommended that subject departments undertake a systematic review and analysis of students' performance. This will support the long-term planning for the subjects.

The quality of subject planning documents observed varied considerably. Very good practice was seen in those subject plans which incorporated detailed schemes of work, with some evidence of analysis of the tracking and monitoring student academic achievement. However, there is scope for improvement in almost all subject-planning documents. For example, the TY plan requires further updating and teachers are referred to Department of Education and Skills guidelines. Areas for development in planning include the clarification of the role of subject coordinator, further development of common schemes of work for each year and opportunities at meetings to share best practice in teaching strategies.

The school offers a very broad and balanced curriculum to its students with a significant choice of optional subjects. A very good TY programme is in place for one class grouping. The TY programme offers students an opportunity to experience a wide and varied range of activities including academic subjects, co-curricular and extracurricular events. Given the demand for the programme, management should consider the possibility of creating an additional class grouping. One class grouping of LCVP is formed in each of the two-years of Leaving Certificate. To encourage the increased uptake of the programme, timetabling and option blocks should be reviewed.

In line with guidelines and best practice, dedicated coordination time should be allocated to the formal coordination of the LCVP. The overall coordination of both TY and LCVP programmes requires attention as there is an inequality in the allocation of coordination planning time. Further guidance in this regard should be sought from Circular PPT 17/02.

However, such a wide-ranging curriculum may not be sustainable in the long-term. The provision of a wide choice can result in the creation of a class group even in the context of small numbers. A review of the curriculum should examine the optimum curriculum to offer in terms of time and teaching hours available. Even in the context of offering such a broad curriculum, the current timetable operated by the school falls short of the minimum 28 hours instruction time. Timetabling of study periods for some students in senior cycle does not constitute tuition time and should be discontinued. It is recommended that management review such practices to ensure compliance with Circular M29/95 Time in School.

Currently, most teachers are deployed in accordance with their qualifications, skills and expertise, with some exceptions. A curriculum review would help in the long-term planning for the identification of subject areas in need of specialist teachers, such as Mathematics and Physical Education. In this way, management can then prioritise and plan to address shortfalls.

The introduction of a voluntary class tutor system, the restructuring of year head duties and the positive behaviour programme, support ongoing efforts to promote positive student behaviour. The establishment of such systems facilitates a consistent approach to addressing student behaviour should any challenging behaviour occur. The presentations made by senior management to students during assemblies could usefully be developed into a student friendly code of behaviour and be included in the student journal.

A successful pastoral care team operates within the school comprising a core group of school staff and a SCP coordinator, which provides an enhanced level of supports including counselling to the students. Those students who are identified as "at risk" of early school leaving are targeted and specific interventions put in place for them.

A significant allocation of resources has been given to the school to support students with additional educational needs. In line with best practice, a core team of teams of teachers has been identified and individual educational plans have been devised for specific students. To augment the current provision of support, consideration should be given to additional strategies including team teaching to maximise the available resources.

The overall provision of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and RSE requires significant restructuring and development. The establishment of a core team of appropriately trained SPHE/RSE teachers and the development of a comprehensive subject plan for SPHE at junior cycle and an appropriate developmental programme of RSE for senior cycle students in line with relevant circulars is recommended. Elements of a whole-school guidance plan are in place with practices and procedures documented in a range of school policies. It is recommended that a whole-school guidance plan be progressed to incorporate all policies and planning documents relating to student support and welfare.

The student council meets regularly and has been very active in the life of the school. This year, it has successfully developed an Anti-Bullying programme, which it delivered to students in the school through workshops and disseminated more widely through a very successful inter-schools conference on this topic. At present, the student council comprise students only for senior cycle. To ensure that all students' voices are accounted for it is recommended that the students' council be more representative of the entire student body with democratically elected students from both the junior and senior cycle student cohort

Events to celebrate students' success in academic and extracurricular activities take place during school assemblies and at an end of year awards ceremony. A comprehensive range of extracurricular events, such as cricket, soccer and athletics is available to students in the school. In addition, students have the opportunity to participate in the school's musical group "An Caisleán" and through annual fundraising events that support local and international organisation. Students also have opportunities to participate in co-curricular events such as Maths Week. The support and commitment offered to students from their teachers and management is commended.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Post-Primary Schools without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Post-Primary Schools, with the exception of an acceptable provision of a senior cycle RSE programme.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty lessons in core, optional and practical subjects were evaluated across a range of year groups, levels and programmes. The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was good or very good. There was scope for development in a few lessons where further development of collaborative and cooperative learning opportunities is recommended.

In almost all lessons, very good practice was seen where learning objectives were explicitly stated. In some lessons, the recording of the lesson objectives on the board would have facilitated consolidation and a recapitulation of the lesson outcomes and this practice is encouraged.

In general, a clear focus and an effective structure and pace in lessons allowed for meaningful engagement and exchanges to take place. There was good use of subject-specific terminology by both the teacher and students overall and in some lessons, key words were recorded on the board and definitions sought. Key word journals have been

introduced recently into first year and should over time prove beneficial to support the school's literacy strategy.

All teachers were committed to supporting their students' learning by affirming their work and facilitating student questioning. In addition, teachers provided one-to-one support to their students as they completed assigned tasks, all of which was done in sensitive caring manner.

Successful lessons were characterised by teachers creating a stimulating learning environment, linking learning with real life contexts and setting challenging activities that encouraged active student engagement in their learning. The effective methodologies observed, such as group or pair work, and brainstorming activities, allowed students to work collaboratively facilitating successful co-operative learning. In some lessons, an over emphasis on teacher-led instruction limited students' engagement in their learning. It is therefore recommended that, teachers act as facilitators of students' learning and provide greater opportunities for student-centred and student-led activities.

The questioning strategies were effective for the most part with very good use of probing questions that encouraged students to provide justification for their answers. A greater balance should be achieved between lower and higher-order questions that will engage students in their learning whilst providing teachers with an opportunity to check for understanding. Global questions were used in many lessons and resulted in some students becoming disengaged. All teachers are encouraged to share best practices in relation to questioning strategies and greater use made of targeted questions, where appropriate, is recommended.

A range of resources were effectively integrated at key junctures into lessons, including textbooks and teacher generated resources. ICT was very successfully used in many lessons, with audio clips, PowerPoint presentations and visual animation used to enhance learning. In addition, some teachers are using virtual learning environments as a mechanism to support out of class student learning.

Many classrooms are teacher-based and have benefited from the investment by management in ICT. There were many examples of good practice in classrooms where students' project work and posters and commercially sourced materials were displayed. Given the learning benefits associated with the development of such resources, further work in this area is encouraged. In most of the classrooms, the traditional style of desk and chair does not fully support group activities and the rearrangement of seats to facilitate group work should be considered.

Homework was assigned in lessons observed and reflected the work covered during the lesson. Teachers provide oral feedback during lessons with some teachers also providing written formative feedback on students' written work. However, there is a need for a consistent approach to formative feedback on students' work. The collation of a portfolio of students' work that could be used as a record of student learning should be considered for non-examination subjects. It is recommended that a whole-school assessment policy should be developed and implemented which incorporates the systematic monitoring of students' progress and attainment already in place.

Entries of assigned homework in students' journals are sporadic with many journals having little or no entries. The effective use of these journals by the students should be explored, as this should allow students to sharing in taking responsibility for their own learning.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Previous subject inspections took place in Spanish, History, Design Communication and Graphics, English and Science and Biology. The recommendations from previous subject inspection reports pertaining to management issues have been addressed satisfactorily. In particular, mixed-ability was introduced into first year in September 2012 as a basis for class formation.

The upgrading of ICT within teacher-based classrooms has resulted in teachers integrating a range of digital resources into lessons. Further areas still to be addressed include an increase in time allocated to Irish at junior cycle and the deployment of teachers to their subject expertise.

3.2 Learning and teaching

During language lessons, the target language was effectively being used and the different language skills are being taught in an integrated manner. The sharing of lesson outcomes is now a frequent feature in lessons observed.

Recently, there has been an increased focus on collaborative subject planning in subject areas. However, there is scope for development in subject planning to encompass further collaborative practices within subject departments to develop an agreed subject department plan which would include the organisational details, schemes of work and the overall long-term development objective of the subject. Subject department planning time should also allow for the sharing of best practice that would support active learning opportunities for the subject.

4. THE SCHOOL'S SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS AND CAPACITY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

School review and self-evaluation processes have been progressed recently and focus on the prioritised school self-evaluation theme of literacy. A subcommittee has been established, questionnaires administered to gather the views of staff, parents and students and their findings collated. A range of initiatives have been developed and some are being implemented and reviewed on a regular basis.

Board of management, senior management and staff has effectively introduced and managed significant change in a strategic manner in recent years and the school has demonstrated a capacity to bring about improvement where needed.

Evidence from meetings with the board of management, senior management, teaching staff parents and students, demonstrates that there is a willingness and desire to embrace and progress change. The findings from the surveys of parents and students conducted as part of the evaluation could be usefully referred to when identifying areas for further improvement.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report.

The Board of Management welcomes the WSE report and is particularly pleased with its many positive findings and observations on the quality of management, leadership and learning in the school.

The Board welcomes the report's acknowledgement of the strategic management of significant change in the school, the engagement of the teaching staff in the process of change and development, as well as the leadership and willingness exercised by the staff in leading projects and initiatives.

The Board welcomes the report's acknowledgement of the effective restructuring of middle management, the considerable investment in IT facilities, the celebration of student achievement, the effective contributions of parents' and students' councils, and the provision of a wide range of extracurricular activities.

The Board is pleased with the Report's recognition of the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum and is confident that such a wide-ranging curriculum will be sustainable in the long-term. The operation of a successful pastoral care team and the provision of student supports receive welcome recognition in the Report and the Board is satisfied that the existing Pastoral Care Policy incorporates all aspects relating to whole-school guidance.

While the Board acknowledges that the provision of Social, Health and Personal Education (SPHE) requires review, there is an SPHE team in place and the Board is satisfied that the programme is being delivered effectively to all junior cycle pupils.

The Management and Staff of the school engaged very positively with the process of whole school evaluation and found it to be both a rewarding and reaffirming experience. The recommendations contained in the report provide a basis for further improvement and development.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

The following action is being undertaken to implement the recommendations of the inspection report:

The school is now compliant with 'Time in School Circular M29/95.

A programme of CPD has been agreed for 2013/2014 to incorporate areas such as differentiated learning and assessment for learning.

The delivery of SPHE at junior cycle is being reviewed and the delivery of RSE at senior cycle is being restructured with a view to employing more effectively the school's teaching resources.

A Curriculum Review Committee will be established to oversee ongoing curricular planning and development.

The quality of Subject Department Planning is being further enhanced through a process of collegiality and collaboration in the areas of teaching and learning. This is being facilitated over time through regular scheduled meetings, the development of common schemes of work, and the setting of common examinations.

In order to augment the current provision of special education needs support, additional strategies such as team teaching will be implemented and then evaluated as to their effectiveness.